

Non-Communicable Diseases Watch

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衛生防護中心
Centre for Health Protection



衛生署
Department of Health

Let's Talk about Depression

Key Messages

- ※ Depression is a disabling illness. If left untreated, it can take a serious toll on physical, mental and social health. At its worst, depression can lead to suicide.
- ※ In Hong Kong, a study observed that the weighted one-week prevalence of depressive episode among Chinese adults aged 16-75 was 2.9%. Moreover, approximately 1 in 14 (6.9%) respondents had mixed anxiety and depressive disorder (MADD).
- ※ Depression can be effectively prevented and treated. The earlier the depressed persons get help and seek treatment, the more likely and faster they can recover.
- ※ Many people with depression benefit by making appropriate lifestyle changes too. Adding three elements 'SME' — Sharing, Mind and Enjoyment — into life can also make it healthier, happier and more meaningful. To know more about the three elements and tips promoting mental health, please visit <http://www.joyfulathk.hk/en/index.asp>.



Let's Talk about Depression

If you have been experiencing feelings of persistent sadness, marked diminished interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that you normally enjoy, and are accompanied by an inability to carry out daily activities for 2 weeks or longer, these indicate that you may be suffering from depression.^{1, 2} However, you are not alone. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), globally more than 300 million people suffer from depression.³ More importantly, depression can be effectively prevented and treated. If left untreated, it can take a serious toll on physical, mental and social health. At its worst, depression can lead to suicide.

Depression is a disabling but detectable illness

Depression is more than just a bout of feeling 'blue', but a disabling illness with changes and symptoms in mood, thoughts, behaviour and physical health (Table 1). There are different types of depression. Depending on the number and severity of signs and symptoms, a depressive episode can be categorised as mild, moderate and severe. It is also not uncommon for depression to co-occur with other mental conditions, such as anxiety disorders.^{1, 2}

Table1: Common signs and symptoms of depression^{1, 2}

Feeling	
※	Sad
※	Hopeless, helpless or worthless
※	Guilty
※	Irritable or frustrated
※	Anxious or restlessness
※	Indecisive or no confidence
Thought	
※	"I'm a failure"
※	"I'm worthless"
※	"It's my fault"
※	"Life's not worth living"
※	"People would be better off without me"
※	"Nothing good ever happens to me"
Behaviour	
※	Stopped doing usual enjoyable activities
※	Stopped going out
※	Withdrawing from close family and friends
※	Unable to concentrate
※	Not getting things done at work/school
※	Relying on alcohol and sedatives
Physical	
※	Loss of energy or tired all the time
※	Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or excessive sleeping
※	Loss or change of appetite
※	Significant weight loss or gain
※	Unexplained aches and pains, such as headaches, stomach pain, back pain or aching muscles

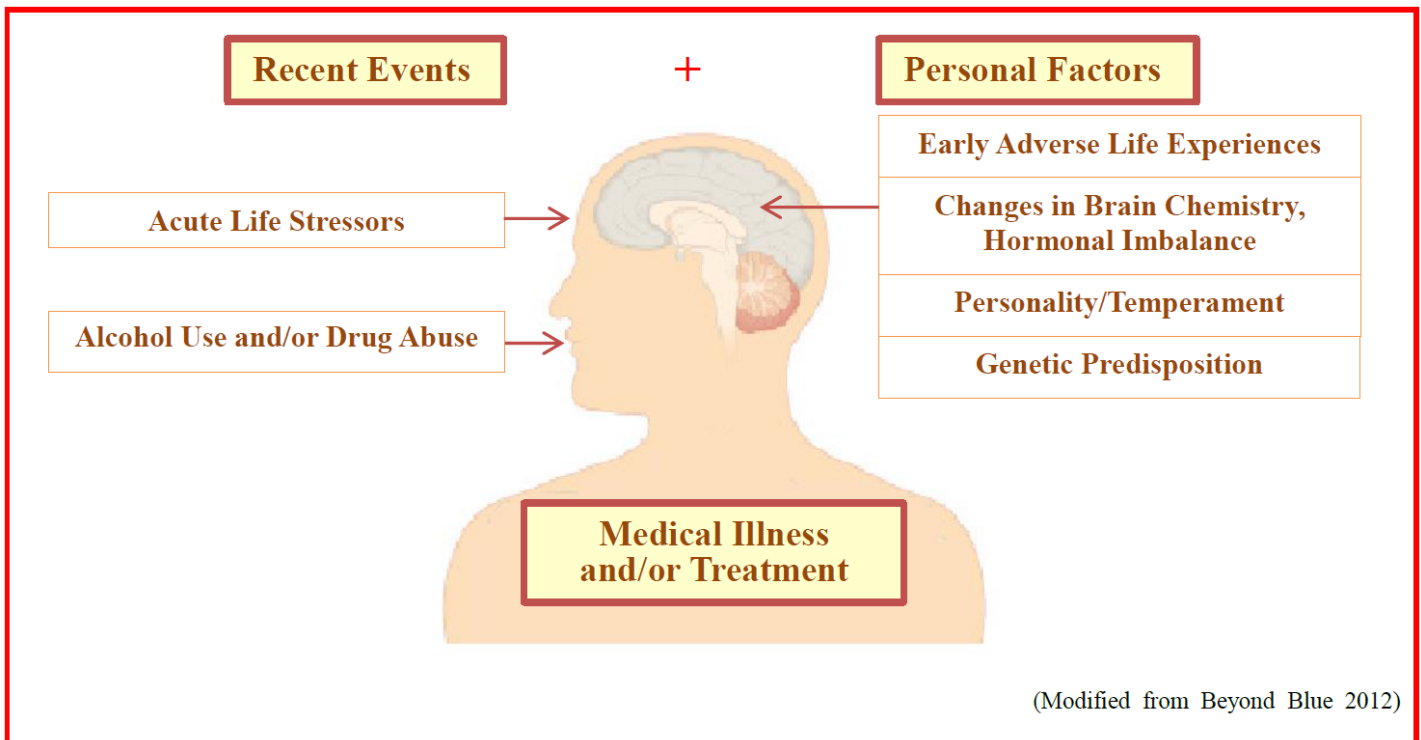
There is no single cause of depression

Same as other mental disorders, depression usually results from a combination of recent significant adverse life events and personal factors (Figure 1). Adverse life events can be the death of a close relative, crisis in marriage, parents' divorce, job loss, school problems, or chronic illness. There is also a strong link between depression and alcohol use as well as drug abuse. Besides, changes in brain chemicals (such as serotonin and dopamine) or hormone levels (e.g. following child-birth) can trigger depression. While females are more prone to depression than males, people who are low in self-esteem, nervous, insistent or demanding are also at a higher risk of developing the disease. Furthermore, depression can run in families so that some people will be at increased genetic risk.^{1,4}

Depression is a common mental disorder

In children, the prevalence of depression is low (<1% in most studies). However, the prevalence increases considerably during puberty with an estimated 12-month prevalence of 4-5% in mid to late adolescence.⁴ In adults, a cross-national study of 18 countries reported that the mean 12-month prevalence estimates of depression among people aged 18 and older in high income countries and low- to middle-income countries were 5.5% and 5.9% respectively.⁵

Figure 1: Factors contributing to or precipitating depression



Depression is not uncommon in Hong Kong

Locally, the Hong Kong Mental Morbidity Survey assessed over 5 700 Chinese adults aged 16-75 between 2010 and 2013 and reported that the weighted one-week prevalence of depressive episode was 2.9%. Moreover, approximately 1 in 14 (6.9%) respondents had mixed anxiety and depressive disorder (MADD). As shown in Table 2, women had higher prevalence estimates than men. While the prevalence estimates for depressive episode were higher in older age groups, MADD appeared to be more common in younger age groups.⁶

Table 2: Weighted prevalence estimates for any past-week depressive episode and MADD, by sex and age group

	Prevalence (%)	
	Depressive episode	MADD
Sex		
Male	2.20	4.72
Female	3.54	8.97
Age group		
16-25	0.55	7.56
26-35	2.86	8.94
36-45	2.60	7.96
46-55	3.55	5.90
56-65	3.77	5.99
66-75	4.70	3.60
Total	2.90	6.90

Source: Lam et al 2015.

Much can be done to treat and prevent depression

Depression can be effectively treated with anti-depressant medication or psychological therapy, or a combination of both. There are also many health professionals and community organisations that render emotional support for people with depression. Similar to most health problems, the earlier the people with depression get help and seek treatment, the more likely and faster they can recover. Many people with depression benefit by making appropriate lifestyle changes too. If you consider yourself suffering from a depressed mood, here are the actions you can take⁷—

- Talk with someone you trust about your thoughts and feelings.
- Seek professional help. Your primary care doctor is a good place to start.
- Keep up with activities that you used to enjoy when you are well.
- Keep in contact with family and friends.
- Exercise regularly; even a short walk can improve mood and reduce depressive symptoms.
- Stick to regular eating and sleeping habits.
- Refrain from smoking and using alcohol as they can worsen depression.
- Adjust your expectations, prioritise your work and avoid setting goals that are hard to achieve.
- Contact someone for help immediately if you feel suicidal.

Caring for people with depression can be difficult. Here are some tips enabling you to help them recover while taking care of yourself at the same time⁸ —

- Encourage them to seek professional help. Offer to accompany them to appointments.
- Help them to take medications if and as prescribed.
- Help them with everyday tasks and to have regular eating and sleeping patterns.
- Encourage regular exercise and social activities.
- Encourage them to focus on the positive, rather than the negative.
- Do not overlook or ignore suicidal cues, any comments about suicide or death. If they are thinking about self-harm, or have already intentionally harmed themselves, do not leave them alone. Report to the doctor or call for immediate help.
- Take care of yourself. Try to find ways to relax and continue doing things you enjoy.

There is no health without mental health. To promote mental health, the Department of Health launched a three-year **Joyful@HK** campaign in January 2016, which advocates adding three elements ‘SME’ — Sharing, Mind and Enjoyment — into life as to make it healthier, happier and more meaningful (Box 1). To know more about the campaign, please visit <http://www.joyfulathk.hk/en/index.asp>.

References

1. Depression and Anxiety. An Information Booklet. Hawthorn Vic: Beyond Blue Ltd, 2012.
2. Depression: What You Need to Know. Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute of Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015.
3. Depression. Geneva: World Health Organization, February 2017.
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5. Bromet E, Andrade LH, Hwang I, et al. Cross-national epidemiology of DSM-IV major depressive episode. *BMC Med* 2011; 9:90.
6. Lam LC, Wong CS, Wang MJ, et al. Prevalence, psychosocial correlates and service utilization of depressive and anxiety disorders in Hong Kong: the Hong Kong Mental Morbidity Survey (HKMMS). *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol* 2015; 50(9): 1379-88.
7. Depression: What You Should Know. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2016.
8. Living with Someone with Depression? Geneva: World Health Organization, 2016.

Box 1: The three elements that can help make our life healthier, happier and more meaningful

Sharing



- Share the bits and pieces in your daily life with others.
- Establish and maintain relationships with others in the society.
- Express your appreciation, gratitude or encouragement to others more frequently.
- Be kind and supportive to others.
- Spend time with your family members.

Mind



- Keep an open mind for acceptance to new ideas.
- Think about the things you feel grateful for.
- Think positively while handling stressful situations.
- Keep track of your mood changes.
- Relax by setting aside your troubles and be optimistic.

Enjoyment



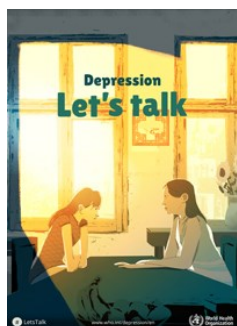
- Engage in and enjoy activities that you are interested in and turn them into your hobbies.
- Regularly engage in physical activities or mind-body exercises that you are interested in.
- Be curious and pay attention to your surroundings.
- Learn something new that you like.
- Engage in activities that can further develop your strengths or talents and maximise your potential.

World Health Day 2017

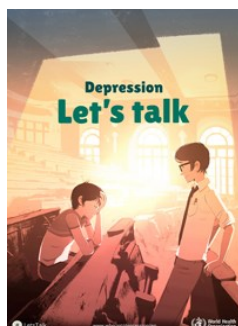
Depression: Let's talk

World Health Day, celebrated on 7 April every year to mark the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organization, aims to mobilise action around a specific health topic of concern to people all over the world.

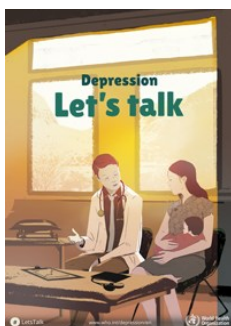
The theme of 2017 World Health Day campaign is depression with the campaign slogan 'Depression: Let's talk'. At the core of the campaign is the importance of talking about depression as a vital component of recovery. The stigma surrounding mental illness, including depression, remains a barrier to people seeking help throughout the world. Talking about depression, whether with a family member, friend or medical professional; in larger groups, for example in schools, the workplace and social settings; or in the public domain, in the news media, blogs or social media, helps break down this stigma, ultimately leading to more people seeking help.



(At Home)



(At School)



(At Clinic)



(At Workplace)



(At Outdoor)

For more information on the World Health Day 2017, please visit <http://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2017/en/>.

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) WATCH is dedicated to promote public's awareness of and disseminate health information about non-communicable diseases and related issues, and the importance of their prevention and control. It is also an indication of our commitments in responsive risk communication and to address the growing non-communicable disease threats to the health of our community. The Editorial Board welcomes your views and comments. Please send all comments and/or questions to so_dp3@dh.gov.hk.

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